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Iranian Exceptionalism and Twelver Shi'ism

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Abstract

Homa Katouzian's exceptionally perceptive, influential, and wide ranging scholarship has been marked by three mutually reinforcing characteristics: a profound and detailed mastery of Iran's multi-civilizational heritage; a comparatively informed focus on the country's distinct historical trajectory; and an existentially grounded pluralist perspective in examining and evaluating the country's major political turning points and actors. These features are already fully displayed in his early magnum opus, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran* (1981), whose historical and political conclusions have been underlined time and again by the subsequent and often shocking national and international turns. In the intervening period, Katouzian has developed the cyclical theory of Iran's history as an 'aridosolatic', 'pick axe' or 'short-termist' society. Of the important questions that his contributions raise or address, this paper examines the long term continuity of Twelver/Imami Shi'ism's trajectory which uniquely in the 20th century Muslim and other worlds produced the leaders of two great revolutions. The result entails the addition of a still unfolding evolutionary-institutional layer within Katouzian's research programme which may enhance its explanatory power and reinforce its political vision.

"One remarkable feature of this revolution [1905–11] – for it is surely worthy to be called a revolution – is that the priesthood have found themselves on the side of progress and freedom. This, I should think, is almost unexampled in the world's history. If the reforms which the people, with their help, have fought for become a reality, nearly all their power will be gone."

(Walter Smart, 1906)¹

"There is no universal Theory of Revolutions since, in any case, scientific theories are not and cannot be universal." (Homa Katouzian 2003)²

The Political Economy of Modern Iran (PE) opens with four quotations, the last of which is from Iran's last *Shahanshah* (king of kings) facing the tomb of the first during the lavish 1971 celebrations of the 2500 anniversary of the Achaemenid empire and proclaiming: "Sleep happily, Cyrus, because we are awake!"³ The other three are from the leading representatives of the pluralist tendencies

that bridged Iran's two "unthinkable" twentieth century revolutions and together produced the inclusive platform that in 1978-9 per capita mobilized the still largest revolutionary movement in modern history.⁴ What distinguished their stance was to reach beyond their own originating tradition and exemplify the unifying opposition aim of realizing the aborted democratic aims of the Constitutional revolution (CR, 1905-11). >

Thus PE's readers see readers seeXXX the one time minister of justice and deputy speaker of parliament, Ayatollah Sayyid Hasan Muddaris break ranks with his fellow traditionalist and theocratic clergy, and declare in 1921 that "Muslim Persia must remain Muslim and Iranian"; the Swiss educated liberal nationalist leader of the movement for nationalization of Iran's oil industry, Dr Muhammad Musaddiq, remind remindthe authoritarian ethno-nationalists and militant secularists in 1945 that

"The people could read about human rights in the constitution, but if the state was not willing, they could not enjoy them... I am an Iranian and a Muslim and as long as I am alive, I will fight against anything that would threaten the Iranian and Islamic way of life";

and lastly in 1951, the democratic socialist Khalil Maleki, vilified as agent of imperialism by the powerful pro-Moscow communist (*Tudeh*) party, callCall on both left and right wing forces to "have faith in.. the power of their own [Iranian] people... the preacher... the white-collar worker... the peasant and worker... the student... who speak about social justice... In principle, the only standard available for determining the aims of a party is the means that that party employs: if the means and methods used by a party contradict its declared aims then we should concluded that that party lacks the objectives which it claims to have..."⁵

The conceptual building blocks of PE's normative vision were grounded through Katouzian's reflections on the renewal of autocracy following the defeat of Musaddiq's National Movement for democracy in the 1950s, although the bulk of the book was written during the 1978-9 revolution. However as its 'Epilogue' indicates, it was concluded when the dominant faction led by Ayatollah Khomeini, the revolution's paramount leader was switching track from his democratic Islamism of the revolutionary period to the then little known theocratic Islamism of his 1970 lectures subsequently published as *Guardianship of the Jurist (Velayat-e Faqih)* or Islamic Government (*Hokumat-e Eslami*).⁶ By then the Shah was already dead in exile and the religious and secularist followers of Musaddiq, Muddaris and Maleki were collectively under siege as "liberals", now made

into a term of abuse identifying all those insufficiently committed to 'Imam's line'. The Imam in question was no longer the awaited Twelfth Imam who went into "greater occultation" in 941 CE, but the newly elevated Thirteenth Imam who had just descended from his Paris haven. In this context, PE's epitaphs were as much aimed at the Shah and his regime as the emerging Islamic Republic or so it seemed as I sat about translating the book imagining Khomeini facing the sky and proclaiming: "Rest in peace in paradise Mahdi; we are now in charge".

The paradox remains that Katouzian's three heroes had all been overrun by the prevailing currents of the age, yet their 'idealist' platform had united the most popular movements in the history of modern Iran, from Tobacco Rebellion and CR to the National Movement of early 1950s and 1979 revolution. Normatively anchored by this inheritance, Katouzian's research program, too, has survived major national and international upheavals, including the ascendancy of theocratic Islamism in Iran and elsewhere, the end of the Cold War, rebirth of God and public religion, and the re-emergence of multi-polarity in international relations. Most tellingly, this claim is attested by the record of Iran's electoral theocracy/clerarchy that was consolidated to the political exclusion of all non-Islamic forces and all non-conformist Islamists. Throughout, before and after Khomeini's passing, it has continuously generated within its own ranks more or less consistent converts (and 'reverts') to the political and developmental ideals advocated by the democratic opposition and thereby have received at every possible opportunity the backing of most citizens.⁷ Ironically, the limited pluralistic space thus maintained has both distinguished it from its sectarian rivals in and around the Persian Gulf and helped ensure its survival contrary to the predictions of much of the opposition and the wishes and machinations of hostile states.

Since the publication of PE, Katouzian has pursued his research programme theoretically and historically across disciplines beyond political economy, including historical sociology, cultural history, literary criticism and intellectual biography. In the process, he has developed the cyclical theory of Iran's history outlined in PE as an alternative to orthodox Marxism's universal projection of class and/or technology driven evolutionary trajectory of many European societies. Within this broad comparative framework he has further specified the key characteristics of Iran as a distinctly 'arbitrary', 'aridosolatic' 'short termist' or 'pick axe' society which dialectically maintains the still persistent despotic-destructive cycle of weak and strong rulers:

'Iran was a *short-term society* in contrast to Europe's *long-term society*. It was a society in which change-even important and fundamental change- tended to be a short term phenomenon. And this

was precisely due to the absence of an established and inviolable legal framework which would guarantee long-term continuity”.⁸

Of the many questions that this perspective raises and Katouzian has variously addressed in his writings, I wish to pursue here what I see as the evolving continuity of religion as an apparently long term source of law, legitimacy, and social power, with a focus [focus] on Twelver Shi’ism’s trajectory. My aim is to insert another layer within Katouzian’s research programme and account of Iranian history that at the moment is precluded by the very general level of analysis at which religion is treated. The result entails the addition of a still unfolding evolutionary-institutional layer within Katouzian’s research programme which may enhance its explanatory power and reinforce its political vision. It is notable that this capacious vision was developed by him and his mentors in the ‘short twentieth’ century when the polarizing, Cold War [Cold War], variant of secularism dominated the common sense of politics, policy making and social sciences everywhere.

Put simply, when it comes to political theology and religious legitimacy Katouzian finds the ancient Persian notion of *Farr-e Izadi* (divine grace) reappearing directly or in an Islamic guise to legitimise despotism.⁹ This rather long term continuity, however, is rendered non-evolutionary and complicit in the cycle of despotic short term society both on ideological and institutional grounds. The hierocracy is politically neutered, for to avoid chaos or defend its privileges it succumbs to the circular ‘realist’ logic of turning the fact of holding of power into evidence of the powerholder’s possession of divine grace, thus ensuring the subservience of religious actors to despotic rule.¹⁰ Thus although continuous, religion was unable to alter the cycle of arbitrary, or more precisely and literally, *lawless* rule, alternating between strong rulers’ centripetal repression and weak rulers’ centrifugal anarchy. This precluded the rise of ‘long term social classes and institutions and more specifically... an aristocratic peer class.”¹¹

Beyond Marx’s posthumously published notes on Asiatic mode of production¹², Katouzian’s account accords with Ibn Khaldun’s foundational contribution to historical sociology. The latter’s cyclical theory of rise and fall of states historically grounds the proto-Hobbesian ‘realist’ Sunni theories of pre-eminent scholars such as Mawardi and Ghazali.¹³ Fearing futile anarchy and internecine conflict, the Sunni hierocracy reluctantly came to advocate the doctrine of might is right provided that potential or actual rulers put a stop to anarchy, uphold an otherwise politically neutered sharia, and defended the realm of Islam against misguided sects and infidels.¹⁴ As a senior *Maleki* jurist, Ibn Khaldun refers and defers to the mainstream Sunni political theology and, as will be seen below,

underpins it with his sociological theory of rise and fall of states driven by tribal solidarity and patrimonial rule.¹⁵

But what about Shi'ism and in particular Twelver Shi'ism which was turned into Iran's official religion since the 16th century? Katouzian in effect extends the Khaldunian trajectory by noting that the Quranic command to "obey God, the Prophet and those in authority among you" was used in combination with the "pre-Islamic myth of *farr-e izadi* or God's Grace to still justify and legitimise arbitrary rule". To be sure, he appreciates that it was not understood in the same way by the "Shia ulama [for whom] of course 'those in authority' were the holy Imams only, not the caliphate and sultanate". This is, however, considered historically inconsequential by further observing that "as is well known in practice they normally tolerated the existing reality, namely the arbitrary state".¹⁶ It is this "well known" assumption that I explore in the following pages, and in turn extend Katouzian's search for the distinctive features of Iranian history. This should clear the ground for developing his analysis of several important questions, including the characterization of Iran's two unthinkable revolutions.

In accordance with his comparative Europe-Iran perspective, Katouzian rejects the characterization of the Iran's Constitutional Revolution as "bourgeois" and essentially defines it negatively as an anti-despotic upheaval which sought to subject state's arbitrary powers to law. Similarly he refrains from viewing Iran's second revolution either as bourgeois or/and Islamic. Instead, in PE he titles the related chapter "the People's revolution, 1979-9", and in his recent *The Persians* (2009) he neutralises it further as "Revolution of February 1979" but retains the earlier comparative characterization of its sociological substance as "the revolution of society (*millat*) against the state (*dawlat*)... In the West it was the underprivileged classes that revolted against the privileged classes, who were represented by the state; whereas in Iranian revolutions, it was society as a whole that revolted against the state..."¹⁷

This is true as far as it goes, but it does not explain what made these revolutions "unthinkable" for "Euro-centric" or indeed other commentators. For a key element in so describing them was that both were clerically led, took place in the secularist twentieth century, and the outcome of the first was a democratic constitution (with limited theocratic safeguards) and the outcome of the second, seven decades of 'modernization' later, was a theocracy (with limited democratic safeguards). Even after the Arab Spring, no other Muslim countries matches Iran in the depth and breadth of its popular movements and the key roles played therein by the clergy.¹⁸ In contrast, theo-political

movements in Sunni majority countries, from Pakistan to Egypt and from Indonesia to Turkey, have been generally led by lay religious activists and intellectuals. In short, Shi'i hierocracy's historically distinct institutional entrenchment and agency stands apart from its counterparts in Sunni Islam or indeed pre-Islamic Iran.

The following freely draws on my published work as well as ongoing research to explore three key moments in the Twelver Shi'i trajectory, namely occultation, adoption as the religion of Iranian state and society, and the hegemonic consolidation of the *Usuli* tendency in the 19th century culminating in the Tobacco Rebellion of 1891-2 where at last a potent anti-despotic/anti-imperialist alliance crystalizes, variously mobilized and sustained by the merchants and the intelligentsia as well as the clergy. It is at this point that the ground is opened for the CR and movements that thence have made Iranian exceptionalism visible, and which Katouzian has studied with exceptional insight and through illuminating detail. The result, if at all credible, may in turn entail a reconsideration of Iran's two great revolutions as reolutions. This re-defines the term Timothy Garton Ash coined to capture the comparatively peaceful and largely negotiated transformations that Soviet Union's European satellites underwent following the end of the Cold War.¹⁹ Here, reolution includes, from a post-secularist perspective, the hitherto unnamed dimension of Iran's revolutions as hyper charged moments in a multifaceted process of ongoing post-modern Islamic-Shi'i 'reformation'.²⁰ As such, these reolutions are distinguished from both modern revolutions and the premodern Protestant Reformation that paved the path for the rise of Euro-centred modernity or the Sunni routinisation/reformation of Islam under the Abbasids that accommodated and regulated its expansive dynastic empires. A necessary condition of their possibility is, as will be seen below, the evolution in Twelver Shi'ism over many centuries of a distinct (and in Islam unique) type of poly-centred 'church' with the institutional autonomy and ideological and material resources to produce authoritative agents of 'reactionary' as well as 'progressive' reform.

The Rise of Twelver Shi'ism and the Occultation of Imam of the Age

Performing the Prophet's burial rites, his son in law and cousin Ali and many who favoured him as Muhammad's caliph (successor) were absent from the council that elected Abu Bakr, the prophet's father in law. Following the consolidation of Shi'ism, this grievance came to be seen as the first in a series of transgressions committed by 'usurpatory' caliphs against the Prophet's true successors, that is Ali and his 'infallible' offspring. To avoid martyrdom, the fate believed to have been visited on all his forefathers, the twelfth imam went into occultation in 874 C.E. to return to restore the just order before the Judgement Day.

Although this primordialist (re-) construction of the Sunni-Shia split is understandable in the schism's retrospective light, it is not persuasively supported by a critical scrutiny of scanty historical evidence or indeed the mytho-historical accounts that have functioned as facts for generations. The salient observation here is that however unhappily, Ali himself accepted the consensus of the electors, even if critically and to avoid internecine conflict, and went on to be elected the fourth caliph and venerated by the future Sunnis as the last of the 'rightly guided caliphs'. The consecration of these caliphs took place when the proto-democratic (or anti-pharaonic) basis of their polity was replaced by the dynastic principle and the armed might of Umayyads.

All notable branches of Islam crystalized in response to the coercive transmogrification of the retrospectively sacralised 'rightly guided' caliphate into a hereditary institution and the consequent separation of the sword and the word, merited and inherited rule. From his then modern (medieval) perspective, Ibn Khaldun relates the cardinal question of Muhammad's succession, on the one hand, to the prophet's legacy and, on the other, to the conflict between 'Ali and Mu'awiya in terms that both anticipates Katouzian's cyclical theory of Iranian history and serves to introduce the comparative questions about Shi'i (and Sunni) Islam pursued below:

"When the Messenger of God was about to die ... no mention was made of monarchy because it was suspected of being false and because at that time it was the custom of infidels and enemies of Islam ... All [rightly guided] caliphs renounced monarchy and kept away from its practices. Their commitment to this outlook was reinforced by the freshness and simplicity of Islam and the desert outlook of Arabs ... When conflict arose between 'Ali and Mu'awiya ... even though 'Ali was in the right, Mu'awiya's intentions were not wicked. He sought truth but missed it ... The nature of royal authority requires that one person claim all the glory for himself and appropriate it to himself. It was not for Mu'awiya to deny it to himself and his clan ..."²¹

Ibn Khaldun recognised that the governance of the sacred era went against what he took to be the "natural" course of history and thus treated it as a miraculous aberration²², a normative but transient utopia. He thus readily concedes that, "the Lawgiver had censored group feeling"²³ and rejected royal authority, but then is equally certain that in reasserting it, Mu'awiya was only following the laws of nature. Set in motion by God, and only suspended in the case of miraculous events, these laws were reactivated with the resumption of the normal course of history under dynastic rule:

“It is thus clear that the caliphate at first existed without royal authority. Then, the characteristic traits of the caliphate became mixed up and confused. Finally, when its group feeling separated from the group feeling of the caliphate, royal authority came to exist alone”.²⁴

With the exclusive but unavoidable dominance of royal authority, the natural cycles of rise and fall of despotic states comes into full play. Thence, fuelled by tribal solidarity, strong leaders emerge as founders of new dynasties which eventually succumb to the urban life’s dialectic of growth and decadence and the resulting enfeebled governance and rulers prepare the ground for a new dynastic cycle. Crudely and briefly put, this is, for our purposes, the crux of Ibn Khaldun’s own brilliantly developed general theory of rise and fall of despotic states and short term societies.²⁵ It is, however, notable that here Ibn Khaldun, a state official as well as a Sunni jurist and judge, clearly indicates his normative support for Ali’s cause as the last of the rightly guided caliphs at the same time as he theorizes the reassertion of the natural law of rise and fall of dynasties by Mu’awiya. . The cases that may have made him reconsider the universality of his sociological history, Greece and Rome or Ottoman and Safavid empires, were not or could not be known to him. Here I am only concerned with the Twelver Shi’ism whose normative and theo-sociological foundations were laid following the occultation of the twelfth Imam in the 9th century, but which achieved historical traction and a long term institutional dynamic thanks to its adoption by the Safavid dynasty in the 16th century.

Both Shi’i and Sunni responses to the dissolution of the rightly guided era were crucially influenced by the example of Ali’s sons, the realist Hassan and the idealist Hussain, the second and third Shi’i imams. Elected the fifth caliph after his father’s assassination amidst the ongoing Umayyad armed rebellion, Hassan gave up the caliphate in favour of the Mu’awiya “since I considered whatever spares blood as better than whatever causes it to be shed”.²⁶ In return, the new caliph agreed to allow the community to choose his successor. Instead, Mu’awiya installed his dissolute son Yazid as the next caliph, laying the ground for Hussain’s and other uprisings. Invited by the people of Kufa to lead them against Yazid and then abandoned in the face of overwhelming force of the caliph’s army, Hussain refused to escape and was martyred along with his closest companions. Hussain’s martyrdom became Shi’ism’s most commemorated hallmark, a militant counterpart to the passion of Christ.

In view of the double failure of these and other attempts to restore righteous rule even after the success of the ‘Abbasid revolution’ in 750 C.E., both Shi’i and Sunni political theologies developed

via two versions of 'quietism', which may be distinguished as oppositional and accommodationist or 'realist'. Repelled by the divisiveness and futility of opposition to ruling caliphs, and committed to guarding Islam's sacred legacy from their despotic reach, the emerging Sunni hierocracy developed an ingenious 'second best' solution that dominated until western modernity intervened. Sanctifying and drawing mostly on the prophet's at least partly fabricated words and deeds (tradition/*sunna*), 'traditionist' scholars developed Islamic law (*fiqh* although now Islamic law and sharia, a broader idea denoting the normative way of life, are generally equated) that effectively replaced the Quran as the Muslim's ultimate guide. This enabled them to (a) overcome and resolve the Quran's limited and ambiguous legal content, and (b) trump all living claimants to Islam, including, caliphs, Shia Imams, rationalist theologians and Sufi masters, with the legacy of the dead prophet. Thus armed with the Sharia, the men of the word struck a compact with the wielders of the sword which separated political and religious realms but masked it in view of the sacred era's unitary legacy. Accordingly, the caliphs retained the title of 'commander of the faithful' but had little to do with matters of faith, and the religious establishment, although projecting a comprehensive and binding Sharia, left the political sphere to the rulers without following or developing original Islam's political legacy.²⁷ Western modernity eventually highlighted the debilitating costs of this ideological conflation of the ideal and actual in Sunni Islam, with its comparative 'closure of the gate *ijtihad*' and the related preclusion of an authoritative agency able to respond effectively to new challenges.

²⁸ From this perspective, Shi'ism presents a contrasting, evolutionary, case, even though it lost the battle of hegemony for compelling reasons. For instance, the insistence on caliphate as the preserve of Ali's offspring undermined the case for opposing the ruling dynasties and minimised the role of community (*umma*) and consultation (*shura*); and the assertion of the divine endorsement and holiness of imams appeared to undermine Muhammad's position as God's last messenger.

Mobilized and legitimized in response to injustices suffered by the prophet's 'family' at the hands of usurping caliphs, Shi'ism rested on an oppositional political theology emphasising the inherent illegitimacy of fallible rulers. In addition to Islam's three universal principles that there are no gods but God (the principle of *tawhid* or unicity), that Mohammad is his (last) messenger (*nubuwwa*) and resurrection (*ma'ad*), the Shia asserted two other principles, justice (*'adl*) and divinely guided leadership (imamate). These were confirmed in a longer call to prayer that attests to Ali's divine appointment as Muslims' ruler-guide (*wali*), and enjoins the community to act justly.

Fearing persecution, Imam al-Mahdi is to have appeared in public only once when six years old, on the occasion of his father's funeral (874 CE), after which he went into 'lesser' occultation. During

this period he guided the community through four successive 'gates' (sing. *bab*) or deputies (sing. *na'ib*) who also collected the religious taxes. The 'greater' occultation was declared in a written message from the Imam shortly before the fourth deputy's death when he would thence have no direct envoy.²⁹ This allowed for the emerging Shia clergy to follow the Sunni schools in developing their own overlapping variant of the Law but with the additional collective authority and resources of Hidden Imam's vicegerency. From this angle, occultation laid the ground for at least five long term evolutionary developments.

First, whilst maintaining the universal Shi'i claim that God never leaves the world without a living guide, occultation minimised the institutionally debilitating consequences of patrimonialism by making the Imam invisible and imamate inaccessible to new claimants. Thus patrimonialism was reduced as a source of politico-religious schism, as was reliance on inherited or personal charisma that constrained the institutional development of Ismaili and other Shi'i sects.

Second, the occultation completed the differentiation of religious and political fields by withdrawing the only legitimate agent for restoring their original union. As the last imam became invisible to avoid martyrdom, so were his followers given the option of using dissimulation (*taqiyya*) to ensure own survival as persecuted individuals and communities.. The corollary of this double occultation and distance from the established order was reliance on the community's resources, and the believers involvement in the choice of religious leaders rather than submission to those favoured or appointed by the state.

Third, occultation left a massive void that, borrowing from the pioneering Sunni schools of law, the Shia filled with their own version of the law. Although radically limiting in many intellectual and creative respects, this legalistic turn was important in grounding a stable identity and rational action.

Fourth, adding the traditions of the dead imams as the distinguishing source of Shi'i law did not satisfy the demands for personal guidance. This was addressed in part by waiting for the Imam's return, but also through the gradual clerical assumption of his 'prophetic' and welfare functions (*hisba*). Compared to Sunni jurists, senior Shi'i clerics, the *mujtahids*, retained a still limited, but normatively legitimate and historically consequential exercise of "personal reason" in their rulings. This in turn allowed comparatively greater space and openness to draw on the legacies of rationalist theology and philosophy marginalized early in the hegemonic Sunnism.

Fifth, in contrast to revolutionary Shi'i sects whose radicalism was often driven by charismatic claimants to Mahdihood, Twelvers' institutional closure of the holy imamate entailed a quietist programme. Nevertheless an 'inner' ideological distance provided Shi'i leaders with a comparatively flexible ideational space and motivation to switch from quietism to activism and vice versa. Although this ideological versatility did not necessarily serve the community's interests, it facilitated the hierocratic accumulation of social power. As the Imam of the Age, the Twelfth Imam is invisible yet ever-present and a source of dynamic tension in a context dominated by the secularising/rationalising tendencies of the legalistic jurists. The Imam's shadow spreads to the present day, with Iran's former president Ahmadinejad being one of the self-proclaimed beneficiaries of his direct blessing. On the other hand, the success of the counter-hegemonic clergy in ending the period of quietist waiting for the return of the Imam and play a key role in the constitution of Iran's first parliamentary democracy, or establishing the institutionally novel electoral theocracy following its second revolution attest to xxx [delete the] Shi'ism's capacity for innovative action.

Safavid Dynasty, "Irresponsible" Public Shi'ism, and Dual Governance

It is unlikely that these advantages would have added to an evolutionary breakthrough without the forceful, and theologically questionable patronage of the Safavid state that inaugurated a new, public, stage in Shi'ism's evolution. Distinguished by the installation of Twelver Shi'ism as an imperial religion the threat of Sunni persecution, the main reason for the double occultation of the Imam and his community, was thence removed, and the conversion of most Sunnis by persecution as well as by persuasion was effected. This ended the period of so called private jurisprudence stretching between the occultation (874 CE) and the coronation of the first Safavid Shah in 1501.³⁰

The Safavids thus began as an extreme form of activist Shi'ism, hitherto most potently represented by the Fatimid sultano-imamate, and may indeed have been directly influenced by Isma'ilis prior to their accession.³¹ What, however, distinguished the two was the Safavid decision to convert Iran's majority Sunni population to the legalistic Shi'ism of the Twelver Imamis. In addition to execution of Sunni leaders, desecration of Sunni mosques and suppression of Sunni-Sufi orders, the enterprise was facilitated by the growth of syncretic Shi'i-Sufi tendencies traceable to the loosening of Sunni hegemony under the Mongols. Nevertheless, it is telling that as a result of the scarcity of Shi'i clergy in Iran itself, Arab ulama had to be imported from Jabal al-'Amil in present-day Lebanon and the Gulf region to preside over the conversion process. Ironically, this started the process which publicised and consolidated the Shi'i hierarchy's agency and transformed Iran into a multi-actor

order with both clergy and monarchy drawing on distinct, if generally mutually supportive, ideological and institutional sources of legitimacy. Put in Weberian terms, Quietist-legalist Shi'ism was thus instrumentalized by an activist-Mahdist state in transition from charismatic patrimonialism to a semi legal-rational. It was from this turning point that the Twelver hierocracy would grow to lead Iran's two twentieth-century revolutions, but again, as will be seen, only after prolonged resistance and thanks to new external agencies, namely European imperialism and liberalism and the crucial mediations of the emerging intelligentsia.

As the Constantine moment in the history of Shi'ism, Isma'il's accession raised a question which the Shi'i clergy (and other interested parties) have been or should have been answering ever since: what is to be done, now that the chief reason for the occultation of the Imam and his community has been removed, namely "fear for [the Imam's] life from his enemies, and fear for his friends"³² (al-Hilli 1988: 242). Iran's "Constitutional" and "Islamic" revolutions may be seen as two plausible answers to this question, in and through which their redescription as revolutions may be grounded.

Only God and perhaps the Twelfth Imam himself could know the date of his return, but meanwhile the Safavids ended the occultation of the Shi'i community with a politically protected arena and state. Iran thus became the first fully fledged Imami Dar al-Shi'a/Shia?. Ironically, Shah Isma'il, the initial instigator of this turn, had owed almost nothing to the clergy as he rose to unify and rule Iran. In addition to his Mahdist charisma and military prowess, he also claimed the sacred genealogy that enabled the Safavid rulers to reinforce the traditional "theory of the ruler as the shadow of God" with the additional authority of "the representative of the Hidden Imam".³³ This gave the dynasty an independent theocratic legitimacy that the Buyids and Mongols before and the Afshar, Zand, Qajar and Pahlavi states after the Safavids lacked. Despite or because of this authority, the Safavid dynasty did not so much rely on as establish Twelver or Imami Shi'ism. From this angle, Ali Shariati, the twentieth-century advocate of revolutionary "'Alavid Shi'ism" was right to label mainstream Shi'ism as Safavid Shi'ism.³⁴

The Safavid dynasty established both the conditions that raised the question of Shi'i governance in the post-occultation period and the clerical agency that was to answer it. The broad resolution which held more or less firmly until the CR may be summed up as dual governance.³⁵ As the Hidden Imam's general vicegerents, the emerging hierocracy was to increasingly preside over religious civil society, whilst as "shadows of God" the monarchs ruled the political sphere as the extension of their royal household. This conception is defensible as a broad generalisation. However, it begs the further

question of how this major transformation in the conditions of existence and social standing of Shi'ism was concretely articulated and institutionalised within the hierocracy. The point here is that a combination of factors blocked doctrinal scrutiny and rationalisation of dual governance. The hierocracy persisted with its own mediated authority as vicegerents of the Hidden Imam and refrained from formally establishing a supreme, quasi papal, position rivalling that of the Hidden Imam. Although this did not preclude the emergence of highly influential clerics due to their learning or the support of the monarch and other notables, the poly-centred constitution of the earlier era was also retained. Many important theological and political questions were thus left institutionally and cumulatively unresolved in the absence of a supreme authority. For an important instance, the Shi'i rulers were considered both shadows of God and usurpers of the Imam's authority on the basis of an incoherent and undeveloped political theology. The resulting indeterminacy may have enhanced the hierocracy's political flexibility and power vis-à-vis the state, but at the cost of hindering its own and the country's intellectual and social development.

As a response to its newfound public legitimacy, the theory of dual governance itself thus took a dualistic form within the clerical establishment. The new situation may be illustrated by turning to the documented case of Shaykh 'Ali al-Karaki, the preeminent cleric imported at the start of Safavid rule. The theocratic credentials of the Safavids and the effective subordination of the religious leadership to the state have been noted as distinguishing features of the dynasty.³⁶ It is therefore of special interest that Karaki is addressed as the Imam's vicegerent (*nayib al-imam*) by Shah Tahmasb (r. 1524–76), Isma'il's heir, who decreed that,

“the great sayyids and the lords and the honourable nobles and the commanders and the ministers and other pillars of the sacred state consider the above-mentioned their guide and leader, and offer him obedience and submission in all affairs, carry out what he orders and refrain from what he forbids. [They should consider] dismissed whomever he dismisses among the office holders of the religious affairs of the [God-] protected realms and the victorious military, and appointed whomever he appoints”.³⁷

Karaki had already reciprocated by endorsing Isma'il as *al-sultan al-'adil* (just monarch) and *al-imam al-'adil*³⁸, and heralding the start of a new era in Shi'ism. He thereby sanctioned and indeed received royal stipends and the land tax which “could be taken to imply full acceptance of the Safavid state as a legitimate dispensation”.³⁹ More pointedly, Karaki reinstated Friday prayers throughout the country and made their attendance obligatory. This was not permissible under

usurpatory rule, since these prayers could be led only by the Imam or by a directly appointed deputy. Such transactions confirm the theory of dual governance and a quasi-Sunni turn in Shi'ism:

“By admitting the need for a king to wield the sword in the exercise of justice, the Shi'a accepted, like the Sunnis before them, the inter-dependence of religion and kingship; and just as some Sunni ulama had withdrawn in earlier times from the contact with the state, so also some of the Shi'i ulama withdrew from contact with the state they considered to be unrighteous government.”⁴⁰

This convergence reflects the recognition that Twelver Shi'ism had now indeed caught up with Sunnism and enjoyed the protection of its own state under the Shi'i Shadows of God. Yet the differences that remained were crucial and not just in the long term. Firstly, despite his eminence and the backing of the Safavid state, Karaki appears to have been forced to retreat from legitimising Isma'il as just. Under criticism from Ibrahim al-Qatifi and other clerics, Karaki accepted that Isma'il was yet another usurping ruler and shifted his argument to “now justifying his acceptance of remuneration from the court as a prerogative of the faqih as the na'ib al-imam”.⁴¹ This retreat indicates the resilience of classical Shi'ism and the extent to which the Shi'i hierocracy theologically and institutionally maintained the separation of religion and state.

Secondly, and ironically, Qatifi disputed Karaki's position from a broadly Akhbari perspective that shared the Sunni closure of the gate of ijtihad. In other words, it denied Karaki's defence of his position as an Usuli mujtahid exercising his personal judgment to address new or ambiguous issues. Thus dual governance became a reality in accordance with Usuli tenets, but when Usuli mujtahids exercised their independent judgment, similar disputes could arise amongst themselves. This is indeed what took place to significant effect in the course of the CR.

Thirdly, although the Akhbari and Usuli tendencies predated the rise of the Safavids, the dispute over the character of the Safavid rulers was a new turn as it took place when the community itself was at last irreversibly out of occultation. It represented the first step in the recovery and renewal of mainstream Twelver politics that had gone into decline following the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. It took three centuries and the collapse of the Safavid state for the Usulis to achieve complete hegemony and to fully assume and exercise their collective power as the (Twelfth) Imam's vicegerents against the state. However, already by the end of the Safavid reign, the dynamic reach of Shi'i clergy had reached the point rhetorically assumed in Shah Tahmasb's decree. This time the embodiment of the distinct complexity of Shi'ism's historical trajectory is Karaki's successor as the

leading Shi'i cleric of the time, Mulla Mohammad Baqer Majlesi (d. 1699). Majlesi used his overwhelming influence over the last Safavid ruler, Shah Sultan Hussein (r. 1694–1722), to persecute the Sunnis and other religious minorities in order to fully implement the sharia:

“Insofar as Majlesi promoted and expressed hostility to the Sunnis, he contributed to the overthrow of the Safavid Shi'i state, even while bringing the learned tradition of Shi'ism to new peaks of elaboration and erudition. In 1722, only two decades after his death, Isfahan, with its libraries and madrasas (religious schools), fell to the Ghilzai Afghans.”⁴²

Fourthly, the role played by the increasingly powerful clergy in decline and collapse of Safavid Iran underlines the possibility of divergence between evolutionary or cumulative rise in sectoral power at the expense of societal evolution. Hamid Algar contrasts the growth in power and independence of the clergy and the concomitant decline and chaos in society as a whole and concludes that “the vitality of religious thought and interest [during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries] indicates that there is no simple correlation between the two [religious and sociopolitical] spheres of life and activity”.⁴³ The aforementioned evolutionary advantages of occultation would not have been operationalised on a macrohistorical scale without the external intervention of the Safavids. But then in exercising their growing power, the clerical establishment played an important role in the collapse of the Safavids and subsequent decline of Iran as a major power. With the birth of public Shi'ism, occultation (and its anti-statist and clericalist corollaries) showed its downside or what, following Lambton, we may call its “irresponsible” face. Indeed, making a point similar to Algar's about the same Majlesi, she notices that,

“he admits the interdependence of religion and kingship; but by permitting the believer to co-operate with an unjust government by practising *taqiyya* he enables him to avoid any responsibility for its [the monarchy's] actions and *canonises the irresponsibility* of government. Belief in the return of the Imam directed the expectation of believers to the future and away from the present.”⁴⁴

We may add that this irresponsibility extended to individual believers as well as the clergy and in the process engendered a slippery politico-religious culture. In turn, this reinforced the vicious circle of anarchy and repression highlighted in Katouzian's account of Iran as a short term society. During Shi'ism's stateless era, the practice of *taqiyya* had a political rationale, and rejection of all governments as usurpatory produced a sense of community solidarity. However, the failure of the hierocracy even at the height of its power to adopt a constructive and consistent ethical stance

towards governance of the community both sanctioned hierocratic irresponsibility and infantilised the community. The constitutionalist movement thus represented a new moment insofar as it made the clergy commit themselves to contested socio-political positions and face the consequences.

Naderqoli Khan, the founder of the short-lived Afshar dynasty, expelled the Afghans, reunified Iran and crowned himself Nader Shah in 1739. Had he succeeded in avoiding insanity and assassination and implemented his earliest version of a pan-Islamic rapprochement in which Shi'ism would have been downgraded in Iran (and upgraded elsewhere) to the level of the four Sunni schools of law, Majlesi would have been remembered as the obscurantist zealot who helped bring Twelver Shi'ism's glory days to an end. In the event, the demise of the Safavids proved yet another blessing for the hierocracy. None of the succeeding dynasties could claim the theocratic or indeed historical credentials of the Safavids as the first dynasty to unify Iran along its pre-Islamic borders. And none, until the Pahlavis, achieved the degree of centralised state dominance reached during much of their rule. Iran, however, returned to relative stability under the Qajars (1795–1925), but by then the balance of dual governance had shifted further in favour of the Shi'i clergy, even if the state still retained its dominant position.⁴⁵

Qajar State: Between triumphant Imperialism and Usuli Shi'ism

The foundation of the Qajar dynasty (1794) coincided with the decisive victory of the Usuli mujtahids over their Akhbari rivals. In the next three decades, the new state and its consolidated religious establishment came face to face with modernity in the form of two major defeats (1811–3; 1826–7) at the hands of the Russian armies. These setbacks demonstrated conclusively the vast power gap between Shi'i Iran and Christian Europe and marked the end of the country's political and (Irano-Islamic) civilizational autonomy. The question raised by Europe's global supremacy could not be more desperate in view of Muslims' view of Islam as a religion of both worlds: were Christianity and/or pagan secularism thereby not superior to Islam as recipes for success in this world and, to that extent, evidence of salvation in the next? Ironically, the ones that should have been preoccupied with this question first, namely the ulama, were the last to begin addressing it.

The modernisation–reformation dialectic was dramatically brought to the fore during the first decades of the nineteenth century in the career of the crown prince 'Abbas Mirza (1789–1833). As the commander of Iran's armed forces, 'Abbas Mirza presided over the major defeats at Russian hands which marked Iran's subordination to the Eurocentric world. Far more devastating than the Japanese encounter with the US navy later in the nineteenth century, these wars marked the

emergence of westernizing modernity in Iran as a project of renewal as well as an imperialist threat. In the history of modern Iran, 'Abbas Mirza stands out as the first senior member of the Qajar nobility to ask the right questions and to persist with the cause of reform until his untimely death. What he had to say to Pierre Jaubert, the French diplomat and orientalist, is particularly telling:

"The people are proud of my achievements but ... are unaware of my weakness. What have I have done to claim the same value and honour as the Western warriors? ... From the fame of the French conquests, I know that the bravery of the Russian armies counts for little in comparison. Yet all of my forces are halted by a bunch of Europeans [Russians] ... I do not know what is the nature of this power that has enabled you [the Europeans] to dominate us or what is the cause of our weakness or your progress ... Is it the case that the population, fertility or wealth of the Orient is less than those of Europe or that the sun that shines on us before it reaches you benefits us less than it does you? Or that the God whose blessings extend equally to every particle in the universe has decided to favour you over us? I do not suspect so. Speak, foreigner! Tell me what must I do to make Iranians aware!"⁴⁶

Viewed in the light of claims about the comprehensive superiority of the orthodox sharia as the guide to both salvation and worldly success, the prince's reflections told of the severity of the crisis all varieties of Islam and every Muslim state faced. In response, during his short life, Abbas Mirza tested some basic versions of the alternative agendas that successive reformers attempted throughout the nineteenth century, albeit in reverse order. He thus started where the revolutionaries of a century or so later ended by advancing a protomodern Islam that reconciled religious 'authenticity' and secular 'progress' as the key to renewal of Islamic Iran and its armed forces. By way of calls to jihad that belatedly accompanied the first war against Russia and helped force the second and predictably even more disastrous war, the clerical leadership had shown its power of mass mobilisation. Backing the war as jihad also confirmed the legitimacy of the Qajar state as staunch defender of Islam. In between the two wars, and responding to attacks on his introduction of military conscription and uniforms as un-Islamic, the Crown Prince "caused a passage in the Koran that is favourable to the improvement of the means of attack in the cause of religion, to be copied, sealed and approved by the chiefs of the law in Persia, and disseminated throughout the country".⁴⁷ According to Algar,

"this act is the earliest example of a recurring phenomenon of the Qajar period: the attempt, marked by varying degrees of sincerity and accuracy, to present apparently European importations as forgotten products of Islamic thought and civilization, and thus to ease the path of reform. The

extent to which the motivation of this attempt may be regarded as genuinely Islamic is of little relevance here.”⁴⁸

Abbas Mirza ended his days as what may be called a secularist moderniser. By then, his enemies had succeeded in portraying him as a stooge of infidels, and conscription had been abandoned mainly on account of clerical objections. In this case, the original opposition to the reforms arose from a simmering sibling rivalry over who should be next in line to the throne. However, it was cemented by the common interest of all elite groups, including the nobility, provincial governors and the royal household, whose interests were variously threatened by the consolidation of a centralised, rational-bureaucratic state. The atomistic and putatively comprehensive and unchangeable conception of the sharia that tended to find all non-Islamic things anti-Islamic was the ideal source for delegitimising the reform of evidently failing institutions. As Algar notes, “any attempt at modernisation implied a strengthening of the state, and this in turn an extension of its prerogatives – an extension bound to be resisted by the ulama”.⁴⁹ >

This formulation of the ulama’s position may be traced to the conception of the state as usurpatory and therefore necessarily engaged in a zero-sum game with the Imam’s vicegerents. Yet this same state was Shi’i, the benefactor of the selfsame clergy and the defender of Islam against infidels and heretics. In between these two positions the clergy swung with self-serving fluidity or puzzling duplicity and in the process upheld the canonisation of societal irresponsibility. In his examination of the views of four major mujtahids who lived during the rise and consolidation of the Qajar dynasty under its founder, Agha Mohammad Khan (r. 1794–7), and ‘Abbas Mirza’s father, Fath ‘Ali Shah (1797–1834), Hairi shows the extent to which all four to a greater or lesser degree vacillated between claiming clerical supremacy in governance of the country as the Imam’s vicegerents and shared sovereignty with the monarchs in accordance with their respective religious and politico-military expertise.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, the noblest reaction to the failure of the jihad against Russia of which there is evidence apparently came from Aqa Sayyid Mohammad, the leading pro-war mujtahid who is said to have died of grief and/or dysentery. It is thus not difficult to see why ‘Abbas Mirza reconsidered his constructive engagement with the clergy and instructed his chief secretary Mirza Abolqasem Qa’em Maqam to turn to “men of affairs” and cut all ties to clergy, likening them to “overfed horses who have forgotten their function of running”.⁵¹ This testament becomes fully understandable when it is recalled that the leading mujtahid of Tabriz (the seat of the crown prince), Mirza Fattah, once a

vociferous jihadist, played a notable role in Iran's defeat by surrendering the city to Russian forces. He sealed the surrender by reading a sermon in the name of the Tsar with the support of all but one of the Tabriz ulama.⁵²

In sum, Abbas Mirza's career produced two responses to modernity. The first, pluralist vision pursued modernisation through Islamic reform through universalist or, perhaps more precisely, evolutionary modernisation. The second aimed at modernisation through marginalisation of mainstream Islam and its clerical guardians. From this standpoint, the Shi'i hierocracy appears as the stereotyped Catholic Church, blocking progress and unable to reform itself, even when presented with the helping hand of the state or the positive consequences of sustained reform on display in the successive victories of European armies.

The implementation of Abbas Mirza's testament was hindered by a twofold quandary. As with the "national bourgeoisie" in other "late modernising states", the "men of affairs" who were to partner the modernisers were at the time too weak (and rather closely tied to the hierocracy) to offer effective support. This meant that Qa'em Maqam and the statist reformers who followed him had to rely on the monarch, God's Shadow on Earth. But the problem was that the arbitrary turns of the Qajar kings proved a recurrent feature of nineteenth-century Iran. Having secured the throne of Mohammad Shah, Abbas Mirza's son, against rival claimants, Qa'em Maqam was strangled after a year on the order of his former protégé. The Shah then appointed Haji Mirza Aqasi, a Sufi dervish whom he considered blessed with miraculous powers but who was seen by many others as suffering from real or affected insanity. Qa'em Maqam's other protégé, Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir, became the minister of the crown prince Naser al-Din and played a similar role in securing the latter's accession. He had four years to initiate a far-reaching programme of reforms before being exiled to Kashan, where the Shah had him killed. The next and last major reforming chief minister before the CR, the French-educated associate of Amir Kabir, Mirza Hoseyn Khan Moshir al-Dowleh (r. 1871–3, d. 1880) was widely rumoured to have been poisoned on the Shah's orders all confirming Katouzian's account at the political level.⁵³ In contrast, the clergy's privileges, person, property were generally protected, allowing accumulation of individual and collective power and influence.

Here then is the posthumous epilogue of Abbas Mirza's historical will. Although rival claimants failed to block the accession of his son, his project was in tatters. The common fate of the reforming statesmen left little doubt about patrimonial monarchy as the primary obstacle to transforming the state into an institution that could secure the country's independence and prosperity. This entailed

switching back to the Prince's initial vision of enlisting the clergy on the basis of a modernised Islam or an Islamised modernity. Most modernisers who came of age after the demise of Amir Kabir (many via the Polytechnic [*Dar al-Fonun*] he had founded and/or diplomatic service) gradually turned to this alternative whilst being well aware of the extent of clerical obstructionism and obscurantism.

At the same time, by the second half of the nineteenth century, further defeats, this time inflicted by the British in disputed eastern territories of the country, together with Iran's growing integration into the Eurocentric international order, underlined the material and normative superiority of secular European polities. Largely confined within patrimonial officialdom or Masonic and other "secret societies" and desperate for effective allies, many lay modernisers were variously drawn to the British, Ottoman and even Russian states as well as genuine well-wishers such as Wilfrid Blunt and Edward Browne. But the predicament of 'Abbas Mirza's heirs was more precarious and complex than the situation that had produced the Shi'i practice of *taqiyya* in pre-Safavid Sunni-dominated societies. Even in comparison with other "late modernising" states such as Japan, Turkey or Russia itself, the Iranian modernisers' resources were slight because the patrimonialism of the state, the power of the clerical estate, the country's economic backwardness and the extent of imperialist domination were all greater in the Iranian case. In this context, the case for eventually abandoning the conventional "modernisation from above" and turning to the Janus-faced hierocracy as the one agency with solid and countrywide ties to the nation became increasingly irresistible, not least in view of the rise of reformist clergy such as Aqa Shaykh Hadi Najmabadi and Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi/Afghani and the success of the clerically led Tobacco Rebellion of 1891-92.⁵⁴

The Shi'i hierocracy: Allies of Despots and/or Leaders of the Nation?

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Shi'i hierocracy maintained its dualistic posture. On the one hand, the clerical men of the word were far behind their scribal counterparts in understanding or even recognising the decline of Muslim societies and Shi'i Iran, let alone searching for ways of reversing it or pursuing what could be construed as the collective interest of the umma. On the other hand, they sat atop a religious establishment that displayed growing social power in absolute terms and, more so, relative to the monarchy, the other social actor with society-wide reach and agency. It is this dual posture that explains viewing it as a bastion of reaction, but also as a potential ally in the cause of renewal. This in turn set limits to hierocratic openness to internal or external reformist pressures.

The nineteenth century began with the resolution of a major ideological dispute between the once dominant Akhbari faction and the Usulis, which multiplied the clergy's institutional and social power. As their name implies, the Akhbaris (followers of the "reports" or traditions of the Prophet and the imams) stood for literal traditionalism that minimised the need for clerical intermediation and use of personal opinion in religious law and rulings. Had their hegemony been sustained, the convergence of Imami Shi'ism and Sunni orthodoxy could have been complete with the gate of *ijtihad* generally closing in both cases. In contrast, the Usulis, who achieved hegemony in the last decades of the eighteenth century, insisted on the privilege of *ijtihad*, albeit within the restricted parameters set by established readings of the sacred scriptures. As users and developers of a certain type of individualised rationality, the senior Usuli mujtahids were thus able to consolidate their social power as "Sources of Emulation" (SEs) guiding the rest of the umma, their "emulators", in discharging their religious obligations.

As the most authoritative mujtahids, the SEs qualified by virtue of their knowledge of Islamic law and principles (certified by their predecessors and demonstrated in their own catechism and commentaries) and justice in the practice of law and piety (*taqwa*). Again instead of taking this to its hierarchical conclusion of establishing a supreme authority the choice of one or another SE to "emulate" was left to the potential followers themselves. Consequently, the hierocracy remained a polycentred network, only occasionally and informally engendering a paramount authority or an "absolute" SE. The influence of the SEs to this day varies with their perceived learning and piety as well as the quality of their "leadership" (*riyasat*), indicated by the size of their voluntary following among the clergy and lay believers.⁵⁵ There was also the stipends and other privileges variously granted by the state to an estate which remained a strategic partner even during much of the Pahlavi period. But it was the followers who provided the religious leaders with the social and financial resources (including the religious taxes) which supported their individual and institutional autonomy and provided the means to support junior clergy as transmitters of the leaders' rulings and views. This ensured the differentiation of the patrimonial state headed by the Shadow of God and a religious civil society guarded by the Imam's vicegerents. The "men of affairs", with whom 'Abbas Mirza had hoped to forge a state-led alliance for the renewal of the country in place of the redundant and/or treacherous clergy, were instead increasingly networked through bazaars, mosques, endowments and marriage ties to the clerical estate as well as to the outside world. The "enlightened" merchants and emerging "national bourgeoisie" were thus key links in what eventually became an alliance between the clerical and (modern) scribal men of the word in channelling democratic ideas as well as financial resources to both groups.⁵⁶ This context in turn

facilitated closer ties between clergy and intelligentsia, even though the latter were mainly state functionaries and/or members of the educated nobility. It was thanks to their elaboration and domestication of imported ideas that eventually equipped the 'progressive' clergy to discover/recover Islam's universalist principles and recognize the umma as their political partners in place of the despotic state.

Three other related developments enhanced the institutional capacity and agency of the Shi'i clergy. First, the victory of the Usulis over the Akhbaris was complete. Of the latter tendency, nothing of institutional significance was left to maintain a distinct school in Twelver Shi'ism. To this must be added the earlier success of the Safavids in suppressing the Sufi orders, many of which had Sunni roots. Under the Qajars and in particular during the reign of Mohammad Shah, Sufism made a comeback but never threatened the Usuli hegemony or achieved the popular reach of its counterparts in Ottoman territories or the Subcontinent. Secondly, the Afghan invasion of Iran that ended Safavid rule in 1721 led to the decline of Isfahan as the main religious centre. In subsequent decades, its place was taken by the holy cities of Najaf, Samarra, Karbala and Kufa at the margins of the Ottoman Empire. Although at times vulnerable to persecution by local Sunni rulers or even by movements such as the Wahhabis, this extraterritoriality vis-à-vis the Iranian state enhanced the hierocracy's potency in the Iranian context. Thirdly, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the evolutionary dynamics of Shi'ism produced Shaykhi and Babi reformist movements, the successful campaigns against which further extended the Usuli hegemony and social reach.⁵⁷

Said Arjomand has pointed to "the absence of formal hierarchy ... [and] scale of prestige and learning" to underline the general inability of the Shi'i ulama to "act as a unified body":

"This inability was made painfully clear in the face of the millenarian heresy of the Bab ... The hierocracy was unable to suppress the heretics or prevent the younger *tollab* (seminarians) from joining them. It was the state that stemmed the tide of Babism, suppressing a series of millenarian insurrections and an attempt to assassinate the king (1848–52)."⁵⁸

The view from this angle becomes especially notable when the Catholic Church is taken as the comparative reference case. Yet it needs to be balanced by, say, a Sunni perspective that would more clearly draw out the exceptional agency of the Shi'i hierocracy within Islamic contexts. In any case, the causes of Christianity or Reformation and Counter-Reformation would not have advanced far without the concerted interventions of their respective political backers. A key feature that

distinguished the Catholic church from the Orthodox was its comparative autonomy and the resulting capacity to produce effective agents of internal evolution as well as breakaway reformation. Moreover, normatively as well as historically, the absence of centralised leadership may have in fact given the Shi'i hierocracy certain evolutionary advantages even over the Catholic Church. From this perspective, the loss of effectiveness and authoritative institutional development resulting from the absence of bureaucratic hierarchy and centralised leadership must be balanced against the gains resulting from dynamic flexibility associated with plurality, autonomy and formal equality of the mujtahids. At the same time, the choice given to ordinary and generally infantilized believers (avaam), empowered them in ways precluded by centralised hierarchies. The comparatively decentralised and direct societal grounding of the hierocracy allowed the rise of maverick but popular mujtahids such as Aqa Shaykh Hadi Najmabadi (d. 1902), and also left the gates of the clerical estate ajar for the re-entry of dissenters, many of whom, as Nikki Keddie and Mangol Bayat have shown, played important roles in the Tobacco Rebellion and CR.⁵⁹ The persistence of these features helps explain why even the formalisation of the authority structures under the Islamic Republic could not completely snuff out the autonomy and pluralist drivers of the revolution or force the hierarchical or statist unification of what may be called the Shi'i church.

Clergy-Intelligentsia-Merchants Alliance: From Rebellion to Refolution

It is in this period that the foundations of the pluralist vision that anchors and animates Katouzian's research programme are laid. By the time of the tobacco boycott, Iran and other Muslim states were wholly dominated by European powers, but the country lagged behind its Sunni Ottoman rival, itself "the sick man of Europe", by any political, cultural or economic yardstick. The despotic acts of the state were on the increase as the gap ever widened between its capacity and the tasks arising from the exploitative/enlightening integration of Iran in the international order. The country's customs and military were run by foreigners to little tangible effect, whilst Russia and Britain had effectively colonised important regions in the north and south of the country and had veto power over Iranian decisions that concerned their "interests". The earlier clerical fears about the transgressive nature of military uniforms were spreading with greater reason to other aspects of modernisation programmes. Increasingly 'nationalistic' Iranian merchants and producers were subjected by their own 'nation state' to extra internal tariffs, bribes and barriers, putting them at even greater disadvantage in relation to their foreign counterparts. In short,

"The Qajar period was not a happy period for the Iranian political economy... Things naturally got worse, for two fairly closely related reasons: on the one hand, the perpetuation of soci-economic

disruption and malady became cumulative in its long-term effects; on the other hand, the development of other political economies both enhanced the *relative* poverty of a backward economy, and affected it *absolutely* as a consequence of the inevitable shift in the international balance of power".⁶⁰

The Qajar state thus seemed not only "usurpatory" or despotic, but also wholly unable to provide stability or to safeguard Shi'ism's homeland in accordance with either mainstream Sunni or Shi'i theories of governance. The balance between despotism in the political sphere and provision of domestic and external security and protection of "Islam" may have long collapsed, but this time an alternative was emergent. It became fully visible in the Tobacco rebellion, in retrospect, "the dress rehearsal for the constitutional revolution" (and the 1979 revolution).⁶¹ An early and perhaps the widest consumer boycotts ever, it was mounted against the British Imperial Tobacco Corporation as the recipient of the monopoly concession to produce and sell the country's entire tobacco crop for fifty years on terms deemed unfavourable to Iranian farmers and merchants.⁶² By the time of the tobacco monopoly, so many concessions had been awarded that the Shah's personal physician, Dr Feuvrier, entered in his diary on 14 April 1890 shortly after the Shah had granted the concession in March that "With concession after concession, Persia will soon be entirely in the hands of foreigners".⁶³ But unlike the others, this one gave rise to a social movement openly pitting the Imam's supreme vicegerent against the God's Earthly Shadow. This was the first such confrontation in the history of Twelver Shi'ism since the battle of Karbala, but it differed from the latter in that now, although close to the site of Hussain's martyrdom, Mirza-ye Shirazi, the paramount Source of Emulation, was standing in the safety of Ottoman Iraq when he issued his *fatwa* banning the consumption of tobacco in direct opposition to the Shah. And this time the *umma* (including the Shah's harem) stood with him till the concession was cancelled.

Shaped by the secularist paradigm, and perhaps in some cases reacting to present day Iranian theocracy's inflated historical claims on behalf of the clergy, recent scholarly accounts of the boycott have searched for new ways of devaluing its clerical leadership.⁶⁴ In her original and valuable study of the constitutional revolution, Janet Afary thus underlines both Gad Gilbar's claim that "outwardly, the 'ulama led the protest movement of 1891–92 which set out to repeal the concession, but it was the merchant classes that played a central role in the movement and gave it its character and decided its final aim", and Mansoor Moaddel's argument "that the merchants' calling upon the 'ulama was a clever use of religion for ostensibly secular and anti-imperialist demands".⁶⁵

The point here is not that these views are misguided as such. It is rather that the civil society–hierocracy dialectic may take account of the empirical evidence these and other scholars have found to greater explanatory effect. As the most articulate and resourceful of the groups immediately threatened by the tobacco monopoly, unsurprisingly it was the merchants who began the agitation against the concession. Equally unsurprisingly, they turned to the clergy for support and received it from the more radical elements such as Sayyid Jamal and his circle, ending with Shirazi’s edict. After all, the merchants paid much of the religious dues which were crucial to clerical autonomy, and both sides had material and familial (through intermarriage) as well as religious causes to oppose imperialism. There was little exclusively secular or secularist in this opposition and, as was noted, the clergy had a long-standing record of opposing any imported innovation, mostly for narrow self-serving and/or reactionary reasons. This time, responding to the calls of their constituents, they represented the joint interest of the Shi’i umma and the Iranian nation which was defined and defended in the course of the protest. Driven by a mutually reinforcing combination of political, economic and cultural factors, the boycott was thus both an anti-imperialist and an anti-despotic/theodemocratic movement that opened the doors to the CR.

Of all the major actors involved in the event, the big loser was the monarchy. The Imperial Tobacco Corporation was overcompensated through a loan from the (British) Imperial Bank of Persia, the first Iranian loan from a foreign bank, deepening the state’s dependence on imperial powers. The clergy and merchants emerged victorious from the dispute over the concession, but more importantly they became equipped with the knowledge that together they could take on the state and win. The means and grounds for replacing the despotic monarchy were thus in place; what was needed was the order that was to replace it. Here mainstream Shi’ism was at sea with its anti-political “waiting” for the return of the Imam, delegitimation of worldly rulers as usurpatory, and distrust of European institutions and practices as the work of infidels and pagans which undercut Islam’s claim to self-sufficient superiority. This is where the intelligentsia came to the rescue by offering a positive socio-political agenda that accommodated the anti-despotism and anti-imperialism of the clergy and merchants and took account of the evident all around success of European states, namely popular constitutional governance and rule of law. The question facing the hierocracy was then whether the agenda variously propagated by modernist intellectuals, officials and “secret societies” was Islamic, or at least compatible with Islam and superior to the status quo, or whether it was heretical and against its interests?⁶⁶ The consolidation of the clergy’s leadership of the ‘nation’ (*millat* in all three connotations of the then chameleon term: religion, umma, and nation) as a result of Tobacco rebellion’s success gave the clergy the collective confidence to consider the modernist-reformist

alternative with greater openness than ever before. On the other hand, having tested and given up any hope of enlisting the court or foreign powers as allies in the cause of reform, the modernizers too were more than prepared to reconsider their assessment of the clerical estate as the chief obstacle to progress.

This was underscored at the time by Malkam Khan, the leading lay reformer of the second half of the nineteenth century, in the first issue of *Qanun* (Law), the reformist organ that was “sought after like sheets of gold”⁶⁷:

“In India, Paris, Tiflis, Egypt, Istanbul, even amongst Turkmens, everyone knows their rights and duties. In Iran no one knows what is illicit and what is service ... There is no governor or prince who may be as secure about his prospects as are the slaves of foreign ambassadors ... Evidently we are not questioning the justice of the Shah... But without good laws and rational government, how could the justice of the Shah reach the call of any of the oppressed? The history of the world has recorded in astonishment that in four decades of his reign, Iran is yet to witness the legislation of a single word of law.”⁶⁸

The case for abandoning the conventional “modernisation from above” and turning to the Janus-faced hierocracy as the one agency with solid and countrywide ties to the nation thus became increasingly irresistible as well as practicable through the mediation of relatively small but influential reformist clergy. The still controversial case of Malkam Khan, *Qanun*’s editor and a leading member of the circle of lay and clerical reformists who pursued the task of creating anti-despotic alliance is particularly telling.⁶⁹ The French-educated, ambitious, clever and greedy son of an Armenian convert to Islam, he translated European tomes and taught at *Dar al-Fonun*. He founded the country’s first telegraph line and wrote official reports and treatises on the widest range of important issues, from an exposition of philosophical humanism and detailed plans for establishing banks and infrastructure to defending the principles of Freemasonry and debunking popular and elite superstitions. Malkam was ambassador to several European countries and assumed the title of prince or, as he preferred to call himself, “Le Prince Reformateur”. He was, however, disgraced for dishonesty following the collapse of a questionable business venture with British partners. Perhaps in genuine “penitence” and certainly with strategic intelligence, he founded *Qanun* in 1890 with the support of Sayyid Jamal and other notable reformists. It was published in London and reprinted in Tabriz and Tehran and soon became the most influential newspaper of the time. Coinciding with and anticipating the clerically-led Tobacco Rebellion that broke out a year or so later, *Qanun* highlighted Islam’s anti-

despotic and protomodern characteristics along with the merits of constitutional governance and the importance of clergy in bringing it about.

Both because of his notably questionable personality traits and his exceptionally influential ideas, Malkam is generally singled out as the exemplar of the reformist intelligentsia that effectively deceived the gullible clergy about the compatibility of Islam and modern democracy. Put differently, convinced of the incompatibility of Islam and democracy, a growing number of scholars have reached this conclusion. Ironically, Freydoun Adamiyat, the most forceful expounder of this view, admired Malkam as “the original and main exponent of the ‘acquisition of Western [farangi/Frankish] civilization without any Iranian adulteration’”.⁷⁰ Accepting this as the authentic Malkam, unsurprisingly both theocratic and democratic Muslim commentator condemn him as the paradigmatic personification of Jalal Al Ahmad’s “occidentosis” or “westoxification” and even a forerunner of the militant secularists’ whose demands and actions (including the assassination of Ayatollah Behbahani) helped derail the CR.⁷¹

Katouzian suggests a different approach by both questioning secularist presumptions (as opposed to secular ideals such as ideological neutrality of state essential not only for a genuine democracy but also for accommodating intra-religious differences) and distinguishing between the “personality traits” of Malkam (and many of his associates including Sayyid Jamal) and “an appraisal of his ideas which... had much influence in shaping the theory and practice of the constitutionalist movement”.⁷² Scrutinizing the latter in the period leading to the revolution through Qanun shows a concerted effort to demonstrate the consonance of Islam, universalism and constitutional governance. Masha’allah Ajudani is thus right to insist that Malkam’s advocacy of (an implicitly modernist) Islam should not be set aside as a marginal aspect of Malkam Khan’s programme. Where his own analysis is questionable is in its insistence that this was a false or necessarily doomed affair rather than a limited but credible early attempt in a necessary and (still) evolving project.⁷³ Whether considered an “opportunist” or “realist”, in this project Malkam was in the company of the more principled Mostashar and Talebov or even Akhundzadeh, the rationalist paragon of uncompromising secularism who at various points saw themselves as both Islamic reformers (or “Protestants”) and universalist westernisers.

From this perspective, Qanun may be taken as the rolling manifesto of the “national” alliance that emerged in the course of the tobacco protests. Three key assumptions, already anticipated in ‘Abbas Mirza’s original vision, resurfaced in Qanun in more developed form, suggesting a marked shift,

actual as well as programmatic, from the state to the nation as the main agent of reform. It stood, firstly, for the rule of law and modernisation of the country based on tested European models. However, after forty years of Nasser al-Din Shah's lawless patrimonialism, rather than pressing for the reform of the military and other particular fields, it focused on legal and parliamentary curtailment of the despotic monarchy itself. Although one of its telling mottoes was that "Even the worst law is preferable to lawlessness", Qanun fought for the institution of "good laws" whose principles are "everywhere the same".⁷⁴ The key term here is "principles", for not everywhere had these principles been realised to the same degree. Iran and other Asian states all had their own specific laws for dealing with military, commerce, agriculture and other particular areas, but they all lacked what Qanun called the "main" or "supreme" law whose developmental consequences are variously underlined in every issue:

"[This] law is the foundation of all laws and the driver of all beneficial developments of the present era ... It sets the boundaries of the power-holders so that each executive, whilst having full authority in discharging his official duties, is held accountable and prevented from abusing his office."⁷⁵

Secondly, the divine sharia and the "supreme law" are assumed to share the same principles.⁷⁶ Given the sound assertion that such a law was yet to be instituted in any of the Muslim-majority countries, this presupposed that the sharia in all its current variants did not fully or consistently embody the cardinal principles of Islam, starting with *Tawhid* (unicity). But this conclusion, let alone its implication that the actually existing sharia had to be reformed in accordance with Islamic principles, was not explicitly drawn. On the contrary, Qanun claimed in places not only that "God's law" is that which is "known throughout the country", but that "the principles of all laws have been completely and perfectly determined and ordained by God, His Messenger and the guardians of religion". Moreover, the mujtahids were lauded collectively as a body "without whose leadership and guidance the people of Iran can achieve nothing".⁷⁷

Seen with secularist hindsight, or in the historical light of the fates of Abbas Mirza and other derailed reformers, or indeed in view of Mostashar's comparative critique of the existing "Islamic law", the charges of inconsistency, idealism, deception or self-deception against Qanun's writers may be taken as read. Yet, a more rounded judgment may issue through further examination of the political, theological and historical dialectic that informed Qanun's ethos. From this vantage, Qanun appears to above all propagate a credible, if contextually limited, programme against lawless monarchy as the root cause of Iran's backwardness rather than the chief agent of reform. This prompted the call

for a “humanist” or representative government based on the secular supreme law yet to be in force in Asia. But in Iran’s case, any legal constraint on arbitrary autocracy sufficed as an overdue evolutionary step towards that common destination.⁷⁸ This was because “in Asia only three countries are left without law: Baluchistan, Afghanistan and Iran”.⁷⁹ At the least Shi’ism’s legal ordinances complemented with elements of modern public law could provide the intelligentsia—clergy-merchants alliance forged during the Tobacco Rebellion with a potent programme for sustaining the struggle for an accountable law state. The consolidation of the position of senior mujtahids as “leaders of the nation” in the course of that campaign in any case made their participation essential to the success of any broader anti-despotic movement.

Presumably but not necessarily justifiably, both pragmatic and programmatic reasons precluded any direct mention, let alone examination of clerical obscurantism and obstructionism in Qanun. But this is far from the end of the matter. The necessarily reformist dynamic of the anti-despotic agenda is consistently underlined in every issue. Examples abound of nonconformist views, including the prophetic and provocative linkage established between women’s liberation, development and ethical universalism by claiming that “no national plan will succeed without the cooperation of women; Iranian women must become the angels that spread humanism” (Qanun, no. 7, n.d.: 3). The reformist programme is most systematically presented in a call addressed to “clerical brethren” by twenty-four founders of the “humanist society” to which the whole of issue 24 is devoted. This (and much of the rest of Qanun) is uncannily telling, not because it underlines some of the key aspects of the revolutionary clergy’s case during the CR regarding democratic accountability in the period of the Prophet and his rightly guided successors or the rejection of quietism, but because in key (legal and democratic) respects it anticipates fully Khomeini’s famous sermon in Behesht Zahra cemetery on the day of his return to Iran (1 February 1979) in the last days of the revolution:

“After fifty years of rule and after they turned Iran into a cemetery, now they want to establish the rule of law. Their aim is obvious and the same as it has always been during this dynasty’s long reign, namely the deception of the people and unbridled oppression. How can the rule of law arise out of a system that is founded solely on usurpation and injustice?...”⁸⁰

The key point, however, which goes beyond Khomeini and most constitutionalist ulama, is the description of Islam’s sacred era as the one in which the *umma* ?, and only the *umma*, was the ultimate guarantor and monitor of the law and the state:

“In the dawn of Islam, there was no Muslim who, when it came to the affairs of the nation, could say, ‘It is none of my business’. In accordance with God’s laws of commanding right and forbidding wrong, each Muslim was considered a vicegerent [of the Prophet] and pursuer of divine affairs. As a result of this public vicegerency and guardianship, the law of Islam with astonishing speed conquered the world for the majesty of Islam.”⁸¹

What is being questioned here, at the same time that Islamic law is being championed, is the clergy’s self-appointment as the Imam’s exclusive vicegerents, guardians of the sharia and the community’s “sources of emulation”. Although not pursued further in theological detail in the pages of Qanun, Malkam Khan and the founders of the Humanist Society in their call to their “clerical brethren” were in effect reclaiming the vicegerency of the Prophet and the Twelfth Imam beyond the boundaries set by the clergy. This agenda, however, became feasible and visible only in post-CR generations, when the clergy lost their monopoly position as the only legitimate arbiters of religion. In its overall spirit and letter, Qanun is not promoting the idea that *mujtahids* will guide the people along the desired path. Rather, its more subtle and realistic point is that the clergy have gained the power to stop the message of progressive reformers from reaching the people. It is over the question of agency to achieve or block reform and modernisation that Qanun renews and develops ‘Abbas Mirza’s original vision and outlines an agenda that combines reformist ends with reformist means, by now relying first and foremost on civil society rather than the state. As such, Malkam and his comrades were acting as lay agents of Islamic reformation long before pluralist Islamists such as Engineer Bazargan, the first prime minister of the Islamic Republic, the founders of the socialist-Islamist Mujahedin Organization, or the eclectic ‘Third worldist’ Dr Shariati, at once the most trenchant critic of “Safavid Shi’ism” and the most influential (and predeceased) theorist of the revolution of 1978–9.⁸²

The decisive difference between Malkam and Shariati was not, as Hamid Algar has suggested, that the former was an opportunist, shallow, and greedy son of an Armenian convert who engaged in “facile identification of two civilizations which were, after all, fundamentally different”, whereas the latter, an upright Muslim born into a pious family, possessed an “original and courageous mind” who “endeavoured to integrate the fruits of modern learning with traditional belief and thus evolve a new Islamic idiom capable of securing the allegiance of the secularly educated”.⁸³ On the contrary, both struggled with various degrees of creative and questionable ideological conflation for a persuasive synthesis of Islamic and modern universalisms in very different international and national contexts. From this angle, what above all separated them and their generations was that in Malkam’s time, the ulama were the sole authorised voices of Shi’i Islam and indeed Iran’s civil

society and this constrained the emerging progressive intelligentsia's scope and resources for effective and autonomous reform. Thus the direct agents of 'reformation' (and counter-reformation) could come only from the clerical ranks, regardless of the actual sources of the agendas pursued. With the spread of modern educational and other cultural institutions and opportunities during the Pahlavi period, lay religious actors began to be supplied at an accelerating rate, equipped and authorised to speak for Islam with increasing resonance.⁸⁴

Naïve and/or wise, Islamic or westoxicated, deceptive or sincere, it was the unity strived for by reformers from 'Abbas Mirza to Mostashar, Malkam Khan, Shaykh Hadi and Sayyid Jamal who had empowered (some of) the once quietist or obscurantist and obstructionist clergy not only to lead the overthrow of a "usurping" autocracy, but to help lay the foundations for an order that precluded the possibility of its reassertion. Although generally identified as the opposed intellectual doyens of secularist modernity and nativist third-worldism, both Jalal Al Ahmad and Fereydoun Adamiyat recognised this in their less polemical moments, even as they respectively found Malkam Khan the worst and the best product of nineteenth-century Iran. Thus for Al Ahmad it was the "intellectual-clerical alliance" that made possible the constitutionalists' breakthrough or indeed other rare moments of genuine sociopolitical advance in modern Iranian history.⁸⁵ This coincides with Adamiyat's judgment, at least in this passage and in the case of the CR:

"The constitutionalist movement was mainly shaped by the intellectuals and the clergy ... Objective historical judgment suggests that altogether the history of dissemination of the idea of freedom and the renewal of thought must be recorded in the name of the intellectuals and the history of the national revolution in the name of the mullas".⁸⁶

Clergy Divided: Democracy, Autocracy, Theocracy and Refolution

The CR did unite the people or nation (*millat*) against the arbitrary state (*dawlat*) in accordance with Katouzian's *longue durée* historical cycles. This time, however, its driving ideologies, leading agents, and social contexts were over-determined by the tension-filled meeting of two distinct evolutionary trajectories, the nationally entrenched Twelver Shi'ism (mediated by longer standing and hybridizing pre-Islamic Iranian traditions), and the expansive-imported Euro-centred liberal capitalism. Put crudely, the revolution was discursively framed and politically fuelled by "bourgeois" and "Islamic" evolutionary drivers as well as long term cyclical tendencies. This was reflected in the 'Supplementary Fundamental Laws' of 1907, starting with its first two articles designating Twelver Shi'ism as the country's official religion and giving a committee of mujtahids the power of veto over legislation deemed to contravene Islam's sacred injunctions until the return of the Twelfth Imam.

These and other 'Islamic' stipulations, however, sat next to 'secular' rights such as article 15 of the Fundamental Law that gave the national assembly "the right in all questions to propose any measure which it regards as conducive to well-being of the country and the people... so that after the approval of the Senate and royal ascent it may be duly carried out". In short, reflecting the popular base, national-international context, leadership, ideology and novelty of the revolution, its constitutional outcome too was a pragmatic-democratic hybrid entailing further amendments depending on the balance of forces and the struggles over its implementation in particular areas, most crucially in education and law where clerical privileges and anti-equalitarian injunctions clashed with universalist principles and practices of modern governance, science, and citizenship.

This resolution was evidently unstable and necessarily lacked the logical coherence and ideological resonance of the theo-autocratic alternative most forcefully represented by Shaikh Fazlallah Nuri:

"Divine law is not limited to acts of worship but embraces every major and minor political issue ... Consequently we will never be in need of man-made law ... If the purpose of Constitutionalism were to preserve the Islamic commandments, why did they want to base it on equality and freedom, as each of these principles is the destroyer of the fundamental foundation of the divine law ... My dear brother! If the purpose [of Constitutionalists] were to enforce Islam, England would not have supported it."⁸⁷

In this double light, the comprehensive and lasting self sufficiency of the sharia and the destructive consequences of freedom and equality, the only realistic alternative was the restoration of autocracy whereby the clergy would maintain their long accumulating powers and privileges in accordance with dual governance. In recent years, a growing number of notable scholars have come around to finding Nuri's position more grounded and/or persuasive than that of his constitutionalist opponents who are variously deemed "misled by Iranian intellectuals and those of other Muslim majority countries".⁸⁸ Although understandable inasmuch as Nuri's main aim was the defence of the status quo, and also in the light of the marginalization of the democratic legacy of CR under both the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic, I find this position unpersuasive from either a historical or contemporary perspective. First and foremost, Nuri ignored the fundamental question that still faces all exponents of traditional and theocratic Islam and which was the starting point of his opponents, namely the terminal decline of Muslim empires of both Sunni and Shi'i variety and the potentially devastating question this posed for Islam as the 'religion of both worlds'. *Prima facie*, either this confirmed the claims of Muhammad's opponents that he was a false prophet or it

meant that the hegemonic Islam(s) had been corrupted and/or been superseded by traditions better able to pursue the universalist principles shared by Islam. Put simply, at least within its borders, England may have had greater claims to being Islamic then (or indeed now) than any of the existing Muslim states. Moreover, Nuri here and elsewhere, disregards not only the fact that pre-revolutionary Iran was already dominated by Britain and Russia but that the anti-constitutionalist alliance was dependent for its survival on Russia, the country not known for its benevolence towards Islam or Iran, or indeed its own peoples. Finally, it suffices to note that contrary to the still widely assumed view, Islamic law in both Sunni and Shi'i variety remained politically neutered and never achieved the claimed comprehensiveness, as attested by the long standing distinction between religious (*shar'i*) and secular or state/customary (*orfi*) laws. This in turn provided the constitutionalist clergy with the (ultimately insufficient) grounds to maintain their commitment to both "divine and man-made laws" as in article 8 of the Supplement to the Fundamental Law that states, "The people of Iran shall enjoy equal rights before the state [*dawlati*] Law."

The constitutionalist clergy were certainly far from fully prepared to address the unprecedented task of leading a democratic revolution and reforming/renewing a crisis ridden and comparatively stagnant theological tradition. Yet, they had come a long way since the days of Abbas Mirza and certainly stood on firmer grounds than Nuri and his allies as attested in this passage from Ayatollah Na'ini 's authoritative and still resonant response to Nuri:

"[A]ll experts in the field of politics and world affairs, Muslim and non-Muslim, are agreed that the natural basis of Islam's exceptionally rapid advances in its first half a century lay in its just, consultative form of governance, which respected the freedom of all Muslims and ensured that all enjoyed the same rights as the caliphs ... It is now Christian nations who benefit from accountable governments, derived from the religion of the Muslims. If the umma remains in this state of ignorant slumber and continues to accept pharaonic enslavement and plunder, soon, God forbid, Islamic and national honour and independence will be lost, as is already the case in much of Africa and Asia.⁸⁹

Na'ini and his fellow constitutionalist mujtahids did not mention and most likely were unaware of Ibn Khaldun's puzzle over Islam's rightly guided era as a miraculous aberration of the natural law of rise and fall of states. Yet, they 'naturalized' and understood it as an earthly theo-political project thanks to precisely the non-Pharaonic examples of England and France and the likes of Mostashar, Malkam and others who knew them first hand or through other "experts", Muslim *and non Muslim*. In the process the revolutionaries, lay and clerical, Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Babi and

atheist, laid the ground for accountable government and renewal of *Islamic and national honour and independence*. This pluralist-reformist perspective and authorization of democratic modernity at once recovered and developed the emergent egalitarian values and aspirations of early Islam by incorporating the political mechanisms and secular norms of western democracies, the absence of which had contributed to the demise of the early caliphate and its subsequent elevation as a miraculous exception. In the process, they also laid the foundations for overcoming the Sunni-Shi'i divide by acknowledging the Sunni's ideological head-start when it came to establishing an order based on democratic consensus of the community.

It is true that most clergy assumed that reform and renewal of Islam and Iran could be accomplished without radical reconsideration of the hegemonic sharia or loss of status as sole leaders of the nation or chief providers of education and law. But this makes the achievements of the constitutionalist ulama and their allies all the more impressive. As simultaneous leaders of the non-European world's first modern revolution and Islam's first post-modern reformation facing overwhelmingly hostile internal and external conditions, they laid the foundations and opened the track for recovery and reform that is still inviting. As Walter Smart's "unexampled" turn, the CR inaugurated a new hybrid trajectory that turned the existential threat of European supremacy into an opportunity for renewal of Iran and Islam by internalising universalist modernity and modernizing Iranian Islam's own submerged universalist traditions. At one level, this trajectory proved even more transient than Ibn Khaldun's rightly guided miracle as the Pahlavi autocracy rose out of the ashes of the chaos created by divisions in the revolutionary camp and multiplied by imperialist interventions and the world war. The new despotic cycle began with a state more powerful than ever, thanks to modern technologies, and more coercive for framing its modernizing reforms in a discourse that belittled Islam. But as the fate of the Pahlavi monarchy and the record of the Islamic Republic, examined in PE and Katouzian's subsequent publications suggest,⁹⁰ the legacy of the CR and the goals and grounds of his mentors' capacious vision have survived the widest variety of despotic pick axes (home made and foreign) mustered against them. They thus may yet turn Iran into a "long term society" and Shi'ism into the liberating force promised in the course of the country's democratic-Islamic resolutions.

Notes

¹ Cited in Browne, *Persian Revolution*, 123.

² Katouzian, *Iranian History*, 30.

³ I should declare here certain personal interests. I am a former student of Homa Katouzian and the co-translator of PE into Persian. I read it with accelerating delight during some of darkest days of the Islamic Republic when having been purged from our universities, several colleagues and I started a publishing cooperative (Ketab-e Tehran). Among its first tasks was to balance the lopsided understanding of the Iranian political economy in general and generic terms such as dependent or modernizing, underdeveloped or developing with works that took account of its distinctive historical, structural, and empirical features. We started with Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh's pioneering *Ganj-e Shaygan* or Iran's Economic Conditions (1983) previously published only in Berlin in 1917 and never widely or easily accessible in Iran. In the "publisher's introduction" I mentioned PE among the books in English that needed "special attention". To speed up publication and survive the Censor, PE was divided into two volumes, respectively dealing with Iran under Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah and with the author's permission omitted the epilogue, the epitaphs and certain other passages. These volumes were eventually published by Entesharat-e Papyrus, an offspring of Ketab-e Tehran in 1987 and 1988. Subsequently a unified volume with a new introduction by the author was published in 1993 by Nashr-e Markaz. This edition is now in its twentieth printing and includes a new introduction covering the period 1979-1992 and responding to some reviews and critiques published in Iran including the present author's. See, Katouzian, *Eqtesad Siyasi-ye Iran*, 4-39; Nafissi, Negahi be Seyr Andishe, chap. 4.

⁴ Kurzman, *Unthinkable Revolution*, vii-viii. "Unthinkable" is Curzman's equivalent term for Smart's "unexampled" in describing the CR.

⁵ Katouzian, PE, vi. Katouzian's admiration for the political orientation and personal courage of these leaders has added an insider's critical perspective to his discussion of their limitations rather than causing him to blame their failures wholly on circumstances and the strengths or weaknesses of others. Historically, the most crucial question revolves around Musaddiq's role in the demise of the National Movement that he led where the balance that Katouzian strikes in various studies is exemplary. See PE, chap. 9; *Musaddiq; Persians*, 245-53. On Maleki see "Muqaddimah"; *Iran*, chap. 4; and on Muddaris, see PE, 81-92; 122-5. Conversely, Katouzian's historically grounded and generous approach towards those reviled for switching from militant opposition to serving the despotic monarchy is equally notable. See for a particularly significant case, his treatment of Sayyid Hassan Taqizadeh, the firebrand leader of the Social Democrats in the CR who went on to serve the Pahlavi autocracy as minister, chairman of the senate, and holder other high office. *Iran*, chap. 4.

⁶ Khomeini "Islamic Government".

⁷ Here the following names suffice to indicate the range and importance of some of the more notable defectors: country's first, Khomeini favoured, president Banisadr, Khomeini's first designated successor and chair of the Assembly of Experts, Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, Dr Abdul Karim Soroush, the country's foremost Muslim philosopher and one time member of the Council of Cultural Revolution which oversaw the closure and purge of the universities in 1980s, former presidents Rafsanjani (also the first speaker parliament and the country's Acting Commander in Chief during Khomeini's era), Khatami and the current president Rouhani, and of course the incarcerated leaders of the Green Movement, the former speaker of parliament Ayatollah Karoubi and the republic's prime minister during almost all of Khomeini's era, Mir Hossein Mousavi.

⁸ Katouzian, *Iran: Politics*, 20. See also the essays collected in *Iranian History*; and *Persians*.

⁹ Katouzian, *Iran*, 6-19; *Iranian History*, 23-31; and *Persians*.

¹⁰ Katouzian, *Iran*, 3-19, 21-25.

¹¹ Ibid. 18.

¹² Marx, *Pre Capitalist Economic Formations*; see Katouzian, PE, 7-21; *Iranian History*, chaps. 1-4.

¹³ al-Mawardi, *Ordinances of Government*; see also Crone, *Medieval Islamic Thought*, chap. 14.

¹⁴ As Katouzian discusses in PE, Marx's discussion of the Asiatic mode of production broadly offers a similar account, but at a most general level that needs to be developed, as he himself does, to be applicable to particular 'Asiatic' societies such as Iran. On the other hand, the longevity of Ottoman empire as well as the case of many European states, ancient and modern, demonstrates the limited scope of what Ibn Khaldun took to be a universal law of rise and fall of states.

¹⁵ The extent of Sunni's compliant realism should not be overestimated. For not only all founders of Sunni schools were variously persecuted but also even Mawardi's theory includes the anti despotic/pharaonic spirit and practices of early Islam, such as the consensus of the community. See, al-Mawardi, *Ordinances* [n. 10], chap. 1.

¹⁶ Katouzian, *Iran*, 13.

¹⁷ Katouzian, PE, chap. 17; *Persians*, chap. 12, 326, 325.

¹⁸ Keddie, *Iran*, chap. 4; Amanat et al, 'Roundtable', 147-65; Kamrava, *Beyond*.

¹⁹ Garton Ash, "Revolution"; *Magic Lantern*, 14. Asef Bayat has more recently employed the term in analysing the upheavals of the "Arab Spring" as offering the "possibility of genuine transformation through systematic reform and social pacts" and thus possessing "the advantage of ensuring orderly transitions, avoiding violence, destruction and chaos...". Bayat, "Revolution in Bad Times". See also Tariq Ali's "Between Past and Present: Reply to Asef Bayat". Notwithstanding their sharp disagreement over the upheavals in the Arab world, Bayat and Ali both work with Garton Ash's secular political concept.

²⁰ I have tried to lay the ground for a non-reductionist/idealized concept of historically consequential religious change or 'breakthrough' with reference to Sunni and Shi'i Islam in "Reformation, Islam, and Democracy"; "Reformation as an Idealtype"; and "Shi'ism and Politics". My editor's 'Commentary' in the forthcoming *Shi'i Islam and the Political Theology of Ayatollah Na'ini* examines the rival theodemocratic and theocratic reform agendas of Iran's first revolution with reference to their renewal and development before and after the country's second revolution.

²¹ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, vol. 1: 418-21 (translation modified).

²² Ibid., 437.

²³ Ibid., 414.

²⁴ Ibid., 428.

²⁵ See especially volume 1 of *Muqaddimah* for the elaboration of his theory and research programme and then select as appropriate from what now amounts to a library of commentary on his work or works influenced by him. However, we may as well start with Franz Rosenthal's 'Translator's Introduction' in the same volume where he underlines the all encompassing reach of his cyclical theory: "In Ibn Khaldun's orthodox Muslim environment, it was believed that human intellectual power was always constant and capable of producing the highest civilization at any given time. Therefore Ibn Khaldun could hardly have assumed that steady progress in human civilization was possible or even necessary." Lxxxiv. This is both demonstrated and undermined by the case of Ibn Khaldun himself. In the field of history/historical sociology, his (foundational) work surpasses anything produced previously not just in Islamic civilization but also in Greco-Roman. But then his research programme is aborted and only resumed on a sustained basis when appropriated by modern European scholarly juggernauts. The same of course applies to the earlier and much more consequential appropriation of the legacy of Muslim philosophers who also stand as Ibn Khaldun's precursors.

²⁶ Madelung, *Succession to Muhammad*, 323.

²⁷ Nafissi, "Reformation", 415-20.

²⁸ The closure was of course never absolute and may be asserted only in comparison with Shi'ism or certain other traditions, most notably Western Christendom. See, Hallaq, *Ijtihad*; Zubaida, *Law*, London, 24-7, 143-46. See Nafissi, "Reformation" for a historically informed theorization of the self debilitating consolidation of Sunni hierocracy.

²⁹ Momen, *Introduction*, 161-5.

³⁰ Kadivar, *Hokumat-e Velay'i* z, 12; Nafissi, "Shi'ism" 103-6.

³¹ Katouzian, *Persians*, chap. 5; Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 13-20; and Nikki Keddie "Roots of the Ulama's Power", 218. See also Daftary, "Earliest Ismailis", 153, where he coins "caliph-imam" to describe the religiously and politically integrated rule of the Fatimids. In this usage, the term is the Islamic equivalent of "caesaro-papism" as used by Weber. In view of the original meaning of caliph as the Prophet's successor/vicegerent in both his ethical-religious and political functions and the subsequent differentiation between caliph and sultan in the Sunni tradition and between imam and sultan in the Twelver Shi'i tradition, I have opted for sultano-imamate to designate the Fatimid rule. The term may also be applied to the Safavid rulers, above all the founder, Shah Isma'il, as well as the office of supreme leader in the Islamic republic.

³² al-Hilli, "Imamate and Ijtihad", 242.

³³ Lambton, "Quis Custodiet Custodies", 3.

³⁴ Shariati, *Tashayyo'-e Alavi*.

³⁵ Kadivar, *Nazariyyeh-ha-ye Dowlat*, 14; Algar, *Religion and State*; cf. Arjomand, *Shadow of God*.

³⁶ Keddie, "Roots", 218-220; Algar "Shi'ism and Iran", 325.

³⁷ Shah Tahmasb, "Two decrees", 254; cf. Lambton "Persian Ulama", 277; Algar "Shi'ism in Iran".

³⁸ Newman, "Myth of the Clerical Migration" to Safavid Iran", 271.

³⁹ Algar, "Shi'ism in Iran", 6.

⁴⁰ Lambton, "Persian Ulama", 279.

⁴¹ Newman, "Myth", 273.

⁴² Algar, "Shi'ism and Iran", 326.

⁴³ Algar, "Religious Forces" 701. Although it may be implied in passages such as quoted above, Algar does not examine the extent to which the "vitality" he finds in Safavid Shi'ism was mixed with intellectually debilitating obscurantism and sectarianism, and its long term consequences.

⁴⁴ Lambton, *State and Government*, 286.

⁴⁵ Lambton, "Social Change in Persia"; "Persian Ulama", 289.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Hairi, *Nokhostin Ruyaruyi-ha*, 308.

⁴⁷ Cited in Algar, *Religion and State*, 77.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 79

⁵⁰ Hairi, *Nokhostin*, 323–50. In addition, none favoured the community's consensus in the choice of the ruler, a tradition associated with Sunni Islam which Mirza-ye Qomi explicitly rejected as degradation of the prophetic tasks, *ibid.*, 326.

⁵¹ Cited in Algar 1969: 80

⁵² *ibid.*: 91–2

⁵³ Katouzian, *Persians*, chap. 5.

⁵⁴ Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion*; Hairi, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism*, 55–108.

⁵⁵ Amanat "Between Madrasa and Marketplace" 99–111; Cole "Imami Jurisprudence", 33–46.

⁵⁶ Floor, *Guilds*.

⁵⁷ If Adamiyat's studies have attempted to solve the puzzle of the CR by bringing to the fore the once neglected contributions of westernising intelligentsia and officials, Mangol Bayat has emphasized the role of "religious dissidents [Akhbaris, Shaykhis and especially Azali Babis] who despite noticeable disparity in their thought... shared one ultimate goal, curtailing the mujtahids influence in Iranian culture and society... However, [none] aimed at instituting doctrinal reforms, imposing their own religious authority, or establishing a new creed. To the contrary, they all retained their Shia identity, wore the symbolic turban and clerical garb, and studied with established mojtaheds whom they outwardly continued to serve." Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, 10; *Mysticism and Dissent*, 187; cf. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 415; Martin, *Islam and Modernism*. Bayat appears to conflate the question of effective institutional, historical and ideological agency with that of the putative 'real motives' of particular individuals acting through that agency and indeed buttressing it. It should go without saying that the passages quoted above tend to confirm the opposite of the intention their author discloses at the outset. If Bayat's dissenters retained their Shi'i identity and clerical garb, served the mujtahids and refrained from doctrinal reform, then surely they had thereby rejoined and strengthened the Shi'i mainstream rather than curtailing the influence of the mujtahids that represented it.

⁵⁸ Arjomand, *Turban for the Crown*, 14.

⁵⁹ Bayat, *Mysticism; Iran's First Revolution*, 53–75.

⁶⁰ Katouzian, PE, 45; Bharier, *Economic Development*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, 19–20; Issawi, *Economic History*.

⁶¹ Afary, *Iranian*, 17.

⁶² Browne, *Persian Revolution*, 1–58; Keddie, *Religion*, 1966; Katouzian, *Persians*, 162–9.

⁶³ Cited in Browne, *Persian Revolution*, 32.

⁶⁴ In addition to Adamiyat's contributions before and after the revolution, see, for example, Hairi, *Shi'ism*; Arjomand, "Ulama's traditionalist opposition"; Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*; Martin, *Islam; Iran*. See also cf. Nikki Keddie, *Iran*, 1995 (and her many other studies of the CR and its historical roots) where she issues this cautionary note: "...the argument about the role of [Shi'i] ulama, based largely on an understandable aversion by secularists to granting that the clergy could do anything positive and important, falls down not in its details, which may in part be correct, but in a broader comparison of the unique political role of the Iranian Shi'i ulama as compared with any other ulama." 64. In many instances, this leads secularists (scholars and journalists) to identify "Islam" with its traditionalist and theocratic variants whilst explicitly or implicitly questioning the "authenticity" of the democratic or modernist varieties.

⁶⁵ Afary, *Iranian Revolution*, 31.

⁶⁶ Ann Lambton, "Secret Societies and the 1905–6 revolution" in A. Lambton, *Qajar Persian: Eleven Studies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987) 301–18.

⁶⁷ Nateq, "Editor's Introduction" to the complete series of *Qanun*, 17. The references below to (unsigned) articles in particular issues of the newspaper, some of which are undated and almost all of which unsigned, are all to this volume.

⁶⁸ *Qanun* 1 (22 March 1890) 1–2.

⁶⁹ Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Azadi*, 94-112; Katouzian, *Iranian History*, chap. 5; Persians chap. 7; cf. Ajudani, *Mashruteh-ye Irani*; Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan*.

⁷⁰ Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Azadi*, 113.

⁷¹ Al Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 57-8; Shariati, *Ma va Iqbal*, 77, 156-7; Sahabi, *Moqaddameh*, 165-96; cf. Velayati, *Moqaddameh*, 77-96.

⁷² Katouzian, *Iranian History*, 85ff.

⁷³ Qanun started publication two decades after Mostashar's *Yek Kalemeh* (One Word) had subjected the 'Islamic law' to critical scrutiny with reference to French law, and about two decades before condemnation of despotic rulers and clergy as the agents of the decline of Iran and Islam in the works of Ayatollah Naini and other constitutionalist ulama. See Nateq "Introduction"; Na'ini, *Tanbih al-Umma*; Zargarinejad, "Editor's introduction".

⁷⁴ Qanun, no. 1, 1890, 4

⁷⁵ Qanun, no. 4, 1890, 2; cf. Ajudani, *Mashruteh*, 310-1.

⁷⁶ Qanun, no. 1, 1890, 4

⁷⁷ Qanun, no. 7, n.d.: 4

⁷⁸ Qanun, no. 39, n.d.: 4

⁷⁹ Qanun, no. 7, n.d., 1.

⁸⁰ Qanun, no. 24, n.d., 1. A heavily abridged version of Khomeini's sermon appears in the collection of his writings edited and translated by Algar as "Address at Bihisht-e Zahra", 254-67. For the full filmed version, from the moment of his arrival in Tehran airport see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ITsee9TIIE>. Kadivar examines Khomeini's changing theories of legitimate government in *Nazariyyeh-ha-ye Dowlat*.

⁸¹ Qanun, no. 24, n.d., 2.

⁸² Chehabi, *Iranian Politics*; Rahnema, *Islamic Utopian*; Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*; Akhavi, "Islam, Politics and Society".

⁸³ Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan*, 15 and throughout; "Translator's Forward", 6 and 5. The irony is not merely in Algar's contrastingly biased evaluation of two thinkers both struggling for credible synthesis of Islamic and modern universalisms in very different contexts. For a generously perceptive early review of Algar's biography see Abrahamian, "Review".

⁸⁴ As a most forceful critic of 'Safavid Shi'ism', it is highly unlikely that Shariati would have been at peace with the eventual outcome of the revolution that he did so much to bring about. In contrast, Algar went on to translate "the writings and declarations of Imam Khomeini" including the legitimating text of the Islamic Republic's theocratic constitution, *Islamic Government*, and converted to (its brand of?) Shi'ism. His biography of Malkam faults its anti-hero for failing to lay the ground for the "true regeneration of the country" and concludes that, "Only a serious and well-informed approach to the problem of modernity, evolving out of comprehension of tradition and attachment to it, could have pointed to such a regeneration". As a most learned scholar of Shi'ism, it remains important to know whether Professor Algar still believes that Khomeini's Islamic Government has delivered this in theory and/or practice, and whether his answer entails any reconsideration of the portrayal of Malkam's career "as an illustration of the moral and intellectual level of Iranian modernism" or indeed "traditionalism". Algar, *Malkum*, 263.

⁸⁵ Al Ahmad, *Khedmat va Khiyanat*; Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals*; Katouzian, *Persians*, 293-7.

⁸⁶ Adamiyat, *Fekr*, 247; Al Ahmad, *Khedmat*, 474.

⁸⁷ Nuri, "Book of admonition", 354, 356-7, 359.

⁸⁸ Hairi, *Shi'ism*, 163; see also note 64 above.

⁸⁹ Na'ini, *Tanbih*, 49.

⁹⁰ *Persians*, chaps. 9-14; *Iran*, chap. 6.

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